

IN: Okay, John, I'm going to start with the present and go backwards. What are you photographing now?

JM: Not too much. But I do photograph all the time, I carry a camera with me.

IN: And what type of things do you photograph?

JM: It's always things that I pass through, which are part of my life, people I know, the route that I walk through the city, things I see on the route.

IN: Do people still play an important part?

JM: They're the key part.

IN: Would you call yourself a portrait photographer?

JM: No, I wouldn't label myself like that.

IN: How would you distinguish your work?

JM: The way my head is functioning at present is very different from the way it functioned eight or nine years ago. I summarized the work in "Open Passport," [inaudible] culminated into that exhibition. And yet it's an outcome from "Open

Passport." I see so much photography being done and all the other arts, everything else is happening, and there's more and more of everything taking place, and less and less of all of this more that's taking place could actually touch you. And so I've been asking myself, what is the purpose of doing this work, what is the purpose of living, I think it stems from that, because our work is an extension of our life. So that whatever work I do, I want it to have a meaning not only for me but for whoever, so that the flow of energy will continue, so that new energy could come in, and in order for that to happen, it's got to have a meaningful purpose. If it doesn't have a meaningful purpose that in some way could touch someone else, inspire someone else, make someone else more conscious of whatever, then it really has no purpose and should not be shown, so I'm not showing.

IN: Can you define that meaningful purpose? Is it specific for you?

JM: It's specific, in a generic sense, to all of us. It is specific in the sense that it cannot let you down. It doesn't make you feel good one day and lousy the next. It's a flux which is ongoing, which only gets better and better.

IN: Is that how you would describe "Open Passport" as well?

JM: It ends with the old man, the last picture, there's a sea wall there, which looks like a pyramid, but that's actually a sea wall that I was standing on top of at low tide. And that man, if you look at his face and just the way he stands, had, in his presence, he had that quality which I feel has dignity to it, and which I'm trying to point myself in a direction to knock out the nonsense that is interceding between that dignity and myself and between whoever and whatever my life touches upon.

IN: Do you see "Open Passport" as being less literal and more metaphorical?

JM: Flesh that in a little bit.

IN: Is it "Open Passport" for you a literal rendering of something which is specific? Is it about the people who are actually represented in the book, the situations which are actually represented, or is it symbolic?

JM: Even though each person, we all are specific people with a specific history that makes us what we are, so each of those people in the book are specific, but at the same time they're symbolic, because they symbolize certain aspects of life in that sense, certain aspects of living.

IN: Can you be more specific about that? What particular aspects, for example?

JM: They could be negative aspects, positive aspects, anything in between.

IN: In the book itself, there's a certain harshness to it. Is that voluntary?

JM: That's just the way my life happened. I think it happens to all of us more or less. In my case it just happened, maybe, a little more.

IN: But I think also that you have some control over that by using certain means to render a photograph harsh.

JM: You talking of the way a photograph is printed?

IN: Yes. You have technical means to say something, and you have control over those technical means, so that it can be a conscious decision to make something harsh or soft or romantic or ...

JM: The content that's within the frame of most of the images, they're aspects of life that are heavy, to put it in a broad sense. So then, the way the print was made was to bring

that aspect as fully as possible across, and be done with it, hopefully.

IN: Are all the people in the book, and the people who you're photographing now, personal friends or people who you come into contact with, in other words, are they not strangers?

JM: Most of them, I would say, are not strangers. In the book, maybe a third or a quarter are strangers. But most of the people I do photograph are non-strangers.

IN: Is that important for you? Do you think that you get something from people who you know that you wouldn't be able to get from strangers?

JM: Yes, because I've known many of the people for many years, so I know the history of their life, just as they know the history of my life, so we have an intimacy.

IN: When you look at those photographs, do they project your idea about those people?

JM: About a certain aspect of those people, because it would take many, many pictures, because we all have many sides to us.

IN: I know that right now, even if you're not taking a lot of photographs, that you're teaching, which is important to you.

JM: That's the way it's happening right now.

IN: Can you describe the situation which you've set up, which is more or less outside an institutional system, and what you try to get across when you're teaching the students who come to you.

JM: By teaching someone else, I'm at the same time saying the same thing to myself, because I'm not putting myself in a situation that is in any way superior to someone else, because the people that I so-called teach have qualities as human beings which I certainly lack. Maybe I have a little corner that I could share with them that may be of use to them. So what I try to do is to make them aware of the purpose, since we're using this particular language called photography, of what I see the purpose of this language to be, and how can we accomplish that purpose in as precise a way as possible, in as clear a way as possible, and in a meaningful way. So that by getting a set of images that, again, it always comes back to the same thing, to touch someone. To touch yourself, and to pass on that touch.

IN: As a language, what do you see the purpose of photography to be?

JM: I think it does have many purposes. And one has to objectively decide what one wants to do with a statement that one is going to make. If you want to make, let's say people are not being nice to one another, so if you want to make someone aware of that fact, you decide to take a certain kind of images. That's one kind of image you would make. Let's say, what's happening in Ireland, what's happening in South America, what's happening behind the Iron Curtain, so you could take a certain kind of images in those locations and put them together, not in a photojournalistic way, I'm talking in a way that would get the viewer to feel the kind of energy that people are laying on other people, and that this is a killing energy, and life is for living, not for destroying. That's one kind of statement that could be made that has a meaningful purpose in a situation we happen to find ourselves in. There's a print by [name]. It's a house with a tree against the house and the sun falling on that house. You familiar with that print? That's another kind of statement. I find that [name] with image, not all of his, but certain images, and that is one of them, that with one image he can say everything that need be said in that one image, by just being so still and at the same time so vibrant, at the same time, simultaneously, and that's a feat

that only really a master can accomplish and be quiet about it. Because that's the beauty of [name] is that he was quiet about it.

IN: Do you find yourself close to [name] or a polar opposite?

JM: If one were to talk in terms of patron saint, he's my patron saint, really. I feel very close and akin in spirit with him.

IN: But one might say, particularly about the photographs in "Open Passport," that there was a certain tenderness and, at the same time, a harshness and aggression.

JM: There's all of that, yes.

IN: Which doesn't occur in, say, [name]'s work, that quality of aggression.

JM: The photographs in "Open Passport," I think the exhibition was about eight or nine years ago, and the images go back about twenty, twenty-five years, starting from that to maybe a year before. I'm just working it out, Kathy.

IN: When you talk about someone having a meaningful purpose or something that they want to say, do you think that it always

works in one specific order, that they will have something to say and then they will take the photographs, or is it a continual process of refining what you want to say?

JM: I think it could be both of those ways and other ways. It depends on the process that the individual is going through, the way the photographer lays out his way to work on a specific statement he wants to make.

IN: How do you work?

JM: I usually collect images first, by experiencing them, and then lay them all out, go through the contacts, make five by sevens, and then edit those five by sevens down. But now also I have specific themes that I photograph.

IN: Now you have specific themes?

JM: The interests that I have, which are interests which are close to me, so I make images that fall within those interests. There's one aspect of life that I have become aware of, this started happening in Japan, I'm not sure, since I came back I became very aware of, and I have not started photographing this yet, but it's something which I want to photograph, and these are the people without homes, the street people. So I just, maybe for some reason, I identify

with them, I've walked the streets a lot, coming across the same people walking the same route as I walk, except they've got no place to go and sleep at night. And something's wrong in our civilization when this is happening, something's wrong.

IN: Did you have specific interests when you were doing "Open Passport"?

JM: The Film Board just asked me to make an exhibition, and I had never really made a major exhibition, I just had little shows, so I went through everything that I had shot in the past twenty, twenty-five years, and it starts with a little boy, and it's really the journey of that little boy, what he goes through, so that he could be a man of dignity, which is a human being.

IN: That little boy is your son, and also you?

JM: And also me and also you, and it's all of us.

IN: What other types of interests now preoccupy you that you're trying to deal with photographically?

JM: It's to be able to make a statement with the least possible number of images.

IN: Economy?

JM: Economy.

IN: Inflation?

JM: No, not inflation, not to be wasteful in any way, which means not to be wasteful with life.

IN: Do any of your current preoccupations besides the street people derive from your experience in Japan?

JM: As materialistic as they say Japan to be, but there is still something so timeless in Japan, is that people are grinning. They live life on a much more human scale than people in North America, and it's just about that, what do we have to do to be human beings.

IN: Did you photograph in Japan?

JM: Yes, I took some pictures there.

IN: Are you printing them now?

JM: I've got a set of nineteen images which is already edited and the negatives pulled out, and in the next couple of weeks I'll print it up. That's my start on it.

IN: Is it very different from the work that you did here, given that it's a different culture?

JM: The difference is in the way I relate images, the kind of images, I take images which are very dissimilar, and combine them in a way that they do hold, as dissimilar as they are, they make sense in their coupling. And maybe it's connected with that because you're different from me and I from you, that we should get along together. Now, what do we have to do, what sort of chemistry has to happen between you and I, or anybody, that the differences in people does not stop them from relating to one another.

IN: When you photographed me, you did it against a white wall, with a very harsh light overhead.

JM: That was the only light, that was not to do any sort of harsh photograph, that's because that was the only light that gave me a strong enough light.

IN: I have no objection. What I wanted to ask you is, does the environment ever play a role when the person is there?

JM: Yes, I think in "Open Passport" there's quite a few images with the environment in it.

IN: Primarily intimate environments?

JM: It's usually in the homes or settings that the people are living and doing whatever they happen to be in at the time.

IN: But don't you think that the person himself or herself actually overrides the significance of the environment?

JM: Yes, because usually in the images the person is sort of very strongly into whatever he or she happens to be doing.

IN: For example, the environment simply isn't descriptive like it would be in Gabor's pictures.

JM: What do you mean by that?

IN: He places importance on the way in which someone describes their living space.

JM: No, they just happen to be there at the time, doing whatever they're doing.

IN: It seems that your approach to photography is much more philosophical than a number of photographers. Does that come from a belief that photography can do more than describe external surfaces?

JM: Yes, definitely. That I'm certain about.

IN: What else can it describe?

JM: It can show, in an external way, through its language of the image, the inner space. It can show it by, it would take a number of images, or an image like [name]'s, that one image that I mentioned. He's a rarity, to be able to do that, but I think that it would take, in most cases, more than one image. It would make the viewer, or it could make the viewer experience an inner space, the energy that has taken place inside.

IN: Which, in itself, is a very intangible, indescribable entity. It's almost like negative space.

JM: I'm just looking for words right now. Because finally you've got to come, or you do come into a space where there are no more words. In one mind, if somebody asked me, what is photography, I call it the poetry of silence. And I think, in the fullest use of the language of photography, and it is again the particular image of [name] that is a piece of poetry of silence, but vibrant silence, not just deadness, not just a kind of silence where you feel uneasy, a kind of silence that just fills you with life and you don't want to say anything, you need not say anything, and everything is just right.

IN: So, in that case, words are either unnecessary or inadequate.

JM: Right.

IN: What do you think about people who put words with their photographs?

JM: It depends how the words are used. I would use words with images, but as a counterpoint, it would be like a fugue. But the images must stand, must be able to work and do everything that is inherent in the language of the image by itself, it must depend on the word. That the word would be added just as another piece of beauty, doing what the language of words can do. But the picture must not depend on the word, giving you any sort of information in order for the photograph to work for you. That's the way I look at it.

IN: Okay, I have one last question. What photographers in Quebec are important to you?

JM: That I would rather not say.